CHAPTER IV

COMMOTIONS IN EUROPEAN POLITICS

The Directory and the Legislature — Motives of the French Army — Augereau's Blunders — Humiliation of the Batavian Republic — Seizure of Piedmont — Proclamation of the Roman Republic — Swiss Territory Remodeled — Antagonism of Prussia and Austria — Bernadotte's Mission to Vienna — Prussian Neutrality — Unstable Equilibrium of Europe.

DURING the winter of 1797-98 it was the custom of Bonaparte, as the constructive commander-in-chief of the French forces, to share in the deliberations of the various civil authorities; sometimes they seemed uneasy under his influence, but a threat of retirement generally brought them to terms. They yielded because every faction believed that the unrelenting attitude of the Directory toward royalists, emigrants, and ecclesiastics would revive in the country the hatred of Jacobinism and give its enemies a victory in the spring elections of 1798. Animosity was all the more fierce since the press had been virtually throttled by closing during the winter the offices of some sixteen papers, in addition to many already silenced. Should the chambers be hostile to the executive, they would certainly attempt a civil revolution, and Bonaparte with his troops would be the arbitrator. The royalists, therefore, made approaches to him once more, this time through Mme. Bonaparte, who diplomatically procrastinated, and kept the suitors in expectancy. But while all was movement and plot under the surface, the Parisian populace only occasionally had evidence of aught but perfect harmony